

Testimony of Ardith Crampton
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**RE: Committee Bill No. 5144-AN ACT CONCERNING AN APPROPRIATION
TO EXPAND THE NURTURING FAMILIES NETWORK**

Good afternoon. I am Ardith Crampton, Manager of Eastern Connecticut Health Network's Family Development Center and Nurturing Families Network Program. I am here today to support Committee Bill 5144, which proposes expansion of the Nurturing Families Network.

I cannot think of a better way to reduce the level of child abuse and neglect in Connecticut than to expand the sphere of influence that the Children's Trust Fund has via the Nurturing Families network program. Though admittedly, the economic climate is unfavorable for expanding programs, the Nurturing Families Network has been saving state monies for over ten years. Providing intensive home visiting to high-risk, first-time parents has already reduced the rate of abuse and neglect in this population from an expected 20%- 25% to an average of 3%. That's a lot of families who will not require DCF services and a lot of children who will not enter the child protective service system.

Presently, NFN can help only first-time parents meeting a series of risk criteria. The proposed bill targets the two of the most significant risk factors—single parenthood and poverty. The expansion would offer support to the most vulnerable population—to poor, single parents. In our experience, many families of young, pregnant women withhold support, in effect “punishing” them for becoming pregnant. Of course, the children are the most tragic recipients of this punishment, as their parents struggle to continue their education, find work, locate a place to live, and to be good parents. It's a tough job, even in a two-parent household with a good income. The expansion would extend regular support in parenting and life skills to these young parents.

The Children's Trust Fund knows better than anyone how to run a successful prevention program. They have run Nurturing Families Network for over ten years, and they have run it with a meticulous system of staff training/support and quality improvement. The Governor's budget proposes elimination of the Children's Trust Fund, transferring its programs to DCF. It is unreasonable to believe that poor, single, probably frightened parents would eagerly volunteer for a program run by DCF. It implies that being single and poor makes one destined for the child welfare system. No, Nurturing Families Network belongs in the Children's Trust Fund. It would be a shame to lose this “brain trust” and move proven prevention efforts to DCF, an agency already overburdened with families for whom support, education, and prevention have not come soon enough.